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JACK ANDERSON and DALE VAN ATTA

Mexican Official Intimidated Magazine

The Central Intelligence Agency has learned that a Mexican cabinet member's subordinate tried unsuccessfully to bribe the editors of a Mexican news magazine to kill a critical report on the cabinet official.

Informed CIA and Mexican law enforcement sources have told us that they uncovered an attempt by the former chief of the Federal Directorate of Security, Jose Antonio Zorilla, to pay the editors of Proceso \$2 million worth of pesos, with a promise of \$2 million more if they agreed to spike a story they had obtained on Zorilla's boss, Interior Minister Manuel Bartlett Diaz.

The story is unfolding for Mexican police and CIA agents with the publication in Mexico City of an autobiographical book, "The Presidents," by Proceso's publisher, Julio Scherer.

As we reported recently, the book contains the full story that Proceso never printed: the 1983 kidnaping of Bartlett's teen-age niece and nephew from a religious commune in Venezuela, arranged by the interior minister as a favor to his sister, the children's mother.

In his book, Scherer also tells how Bartlett's minion, Zorilla, succeeded in intimidating Proceso's editors with threats of violence. Mexican reporters and columnists have been threatened often in the past by government officials, and some have been killed.

But Scherer did not relate the unsuccessful attempt at a bribe by Bartlett's emissary. Proceso's editors would not comment on the matter, "especially to an American reporter," one of them told us.

However, our CIA and Mexican police sources said that Zorilla later bragged to fellow police officials that he had gotten Proceso's editors to kill the Bartlett story without paying them "a single peso" of the \$2 million pesos he had in cash. It is not established whether Bartlett had authorized the bribe attempt.

Bartlett is the "iron hand" of President Miguel de la Madrid's cabinet and his possible successor. In a secret profile, the CIA has this to say about him:

"A self-described political animal, Bartlett is probably one of de la Madrid's closest advisers on domestic political affairs. [He] has the ear of the president on a wide range of issues

"As de la Madrid's campaign manager and de facto head of the [ruling party] during 1981-82, Bartlett established control over many of the party mechanisms, and he directed the vote-rigging operation during de la Madrid's election"

Here's how the CIA report describes the police force that allowed Zorilla (and Bartlett) to intimidate Proceso's editors: "The most effective civilian internal security force is the Federal Directorate of Security (DFS), subordinate to Manuel Bartlett The DFS fields about 1,300 agents at its Mexico City headquarters and at branches in all of the states

"The directorate's main responsibility is to monitor suspected dissidents and opposition groups with a view to discovering and investigating any possible subversive efforts. The DFS does not hesitate to conduct searches and seizures and even to detain and interrogate individuals suspected of subversion."